

The Annual Parish Meeting for East Garston was held in the Village Hall on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2016 at 7.30 p.m.

### MINUTES

1. **Present:** Councillors: - Jonathan Rabbitts - Chairman, Chris Tonge, Sue Tulloch, Jane Haddock, Deana Carpenter, Liam Robson and Alan Breadmore (Clerk). Guests: -, Graham Jones (District Councillor), Allyson Bartram (Trading Standards Officer, WBC). Parishioners: - 32. **Apologies:** Brian Cowan, Paul and Linda Tame, Ed James, Rev. Martin Cawte, Gordon Lundie (District Councillor) Richard Benyon MP.
2. Chairman Jonathan Rabbitts opened the meeting by welcoming those present and outlining the agenda. He referred to his report in the Annual Parish Newsletter for an overview of events and welcomed new Parish Councillor Liam Robson.
3. The draft Summary Financial Report of the Parish Council was distributed. The Clerk explained that the Parish Council had broadly operated within budget and to plan over the past 12 months. He then went on to describe the main areas of focus for the Parish Council's activity. These were Village Maintenance, support for Community Projects and Facilities and the enablement of infrastructure, notably the Digital Village project. He reported that, as well as regular maintenance of open spaces, repairs and refurbishment of fences, trees and the bus shelter had been undertaken. Grants had been awarded to the Football Club (mower and strimmer), All Saints Church (gravel drive) and the Quakers (community art/history exhibition) and the weekly Wantage Bus Service. Grant applications forms for 2016/17 are now available from the Clerk or on the website.  
Progress has been made with the Vodafone Rural Open Sure Signal project such that a good outdoor Vodafone 3g signal is now available in much of the centre of the village. A new mobile phone mast has been erected at Eastbury which is expected to provide good service from all providers in much of the village. It is expected to go live before the end of May. The Parish Council now operate a new community website [www.eastgarston-pc.gov.uk](http://www.eastgarston-pc.gov.uk) which has been well received. Superfast Broadband (SFB) from BT (Openreach) is now available to more than 80% of premises in the Parish. Most of the rest will be able to subscribe to a fibre SFB service from Gigaclear by the end of the year. The Village Hall and Social Club has installed a free wi-fi SFB service with support from the Parish Council.  
Priorities for the coming year will remain broadly the same with no increase in Precept. However, provisions have been made for flexibility in the budget to help mitigate the effect of the cuts in services by West Berkshire Council. The Clerk was asked why the precept level had not been increased given the likely need for greater expenditure. He explained that Councillors did not yet have a basis on which to cost the requirement and that the current reserves maintained by the Parish Council were considered by Councillors to be sufficient for any unanticipated needs in the coming year. A further question was asked about the provision of SFB to the Pounds Farm cluster of properties. He replied that the situation was currently unclear but that he would continue to lobby for every property in the Parish to have a suitable service.
4. Allyson Bartram from Trading Standards gave a presentation and answered questions regarding protecting yourself and the community from doorstep crime, nuisance calls and postal scams. In summary she advised residents to be vigilant, especially if you notice suspicious activity affecting vulnerable people. Many of the common nuisance activities are in fact illegal and residents are encouraged to report perpetrators to Trading Standards or to the Police. Trading Standards operate a quick response service if "rogue traders" are reported to be operating in an area. A range of advisory leaflets was available to attendees, copies of which are available from the Clerk.
5. Graham Jones reported on West Berkshire Councils activities. He explained that, in his many years of experience in local government, this had been the most difficult year. Effectively WBC had seen a 44% cut in their grant from central government which is the core reason for the substantial cuts and revisions in services that residents had seen. The budget is expected to be cut by a further £20M over the next few years. Pressure on "traditional" services is exacerbated by the rising cost of adult social care rising from 1/3 to 1/2 of the total budget in the next few years. He outlined that alternative solutions were being sought for all of the threatened bus services in the valley, however the Hungerford (90) service will not continue due to the exceptionally high level of subsidy required. He explained that Government provided transition funding would be used to help maintain library services for the next two years but an alternative operating model had to be found, likely based upon a secure self/volunteer operated service. He talked further about the changing relationship between district and parish councils which is likely to lead to the devolution of more powers to the parishes. He confirmed that the "member's bids" process for help in funding capital projects in parishes was still operating and he invited applications. He answered questions from the floor mainly regarding the cuts in services. He was asked about the potential cuts in local pharmacies, he believed it was unlikely to affect rural services such as the Lambourn Pharmacy. He was asked about the policy of WBC regarding the third runway at Heathrow, he responded that WBC did not, independently, have a policy but that they operated within a multi authority group in Berkshire on that matter.
6. Councillor Chris Tonge led a discussion regarding how parish communities could/should respond to the challenge of devolution of services to parishes. Little conclusion was reached given that no concrete proposals have been made however the outcome is likely to mean greater dependency on volunteering in the community and probably increased costs (and thus income required) at the Parish level. A suggestion was made that wider communication for participation in volunteer working parties was made by the Parish Council.

7. AOB: -

- a. Questions were asked regarding the withdrawal of free primary school bus services. Karen Sperrey, a parishioner and governor of the primary school federation explained that the school was funding the continuation of the service for the summer term and that alternative solutions were being sought for the future.
- b. Martyn Wright, suggested that the Community Plan was in need of review/refresh and that a meeting would be called in the near future to discuss next steps. Anyone interested in participating is welcome to attend or contact Martyn.

The Chairman closed the meeting by thanking attendees and all of the speakers.

The Meeting closed at 9.10 p.m.